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Queen Esther
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ESTHER

After a painting by G. A. Staahl.

Queen Esther

BY

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PASTOR CENTRAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
DALLAS, TEX.

ST. LOUIS:
CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY,
1898.

220.92
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To Mary,

The Faithful Wife, Who for Years
has Been my Cheerful Co-Laborer, Filling
my Heart with Inspiration,
and my Home with Light and Love,
This Little Volume
is
Lovingly Dedicated.

PREFACE.

TRUTH is never so powerful as when associated with a strong personality; and that personality, when pure and dramatic, is sure of a study at the hands of men. Such is the story of Queen Esther. She is among the strong characters of the world, and pure, and the story is one splendid drama from the beginning to the end. No wonder therefore that she is one of the most familiar figures in female history.

When Moses delivered the people of God from Egyptian bondage, the world by common consent labeled it an epoch in its history. Why not so designate this later deliverance at the hands of Esther?

The name of God is not found in the book. This gives to it a striking peculiarity. But as it is studied we feel the presence and power of Jehovah at every step.

Dallas, Tex.

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QUEEN ESTHER

I.

VASHTI DETHRONED.

Esther 1: 1–22.

THE story of Queen Esther is one of the most thrilling themes in all literature, and it will richly reward a prayerful study. To such a study I now invite you. This study shall have for its aim practical benefit rather than theological speculation. It is a mine full of gold,—let us gather it; it is a story more dramatic than a novel,—let us hear it; it is a fountain filled with sweet water,—let us drink it; it is a table groaning with luxuries,—let us feed upon them.

The story is placed in Shushan, or Susa, 200 miles north of the Persian Gulf, the capital of the country known in the Bible as Elam. Shushan means lily, and the city was so named because of the forest of these white beauties which flourished there. After it became the Persian capital it grew greatly and became the metrop-

olis of all Persia. But after the conquest of Alexander its decline began and continued till it became a total ruin. These ruins, which of late have been thoroughly explored, show it a city of great importance, but inferior to Nineveh and Babylon.

The time of the story covers the period following the Babylonish captivity, between the reigns of Darius and Artaxerxes Longimanus, which includes the reign of Xerxes, son of Darius, and father of Longimanus, who is best known in history as the unsuccessful invader of Greece; the man whose vast hosts were met in the pass of Thermopylæ by Leonidas and his brave heroes.

The author is not known. Some think Mordecai wrote it, and others ascribe it to Ezra. But the author, whoever he is, has concealed both his own name and the name of God. But its canonicity, which is the vital matter, has never been questioned by the Jews. It is honored by them as are no other books save the Pentateuch.

A standing objection to the book is that it does not contain the name of God. This objection would have force if the spirit of the book

was at enmity with God, but it is not. On the other hand it breathes a spirit of reverence equal to that of any other book of the Bible. Had it been a forgery, this name would not have been omitted. As evidence of this, the first verse of the Apocryphal addition to the book reads: "Then Mordecai said, *God* hath done these things." The name was probably omitted to avoid an objection by heathen readers, the author feeling sure that others, though they saw not the *name* of Jehovah, would see His hand directing everything in it. His name is not written on the flowers; but who, beholding their beauty and inhaling their fragrance, can fail to recognize Him as their maker? His name is not written on the waves of the sea; but who, as he watches them roll from shore to shore, and hears the deep, rich tones of their music, can fail to see in them the power of God, and hear his praises from the voice of the deep? His name is not written on the mountains; but who, seeing their rugged summits piercing the clouds, can fail to feel that the power which reared them is divine? His name is not written on the sun, moon and stars, and yet "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the fir-

mament showeth his handiwork." Are the cipher dispatches, usually the most important, passing across continents and under oceans, less real because their message is in hieroglyphics? Is the Gulf Stream, sweeping through the ocean, changing the climate of the globe, any less a river because no signboards are erected on its shores, saying, "This is the Gulf Stream?"

Accepting the theory that the Ahasuerus of the Bible is the Xerxes of history, we learn that on the death of his father, Darius, the son, heired the throne of the largest and most powerful empire of the world. But his ambitious heart yearned for more, and he determined to extend the borders of his kingdom. His hungry eye is first fixed on Egypt, and in the second year of his reign he marches into its borders, subjugates it, turns it over to a brother, and returns in triumph to his capital. But he is not satisfied. Success has filled him with pride and self-conceit. Drunk with ambition, he determines on other conquests. Greece is to be the second prey. Revenge and ambition are the two-fold power that moves him. He would not only enlarge his borders, but he would avenge the defeat of his father at Marathon.

And even this is not enough. Greece once conquered, he will then subjugate the whole world, and make his rule and reign supreme. To this end he gave a great feast of one hundred and eighty days, and called his great men in consultation. For six long months they reveled in wine and wealth. His object was to impress them with the thought that his resources were inexhaustible, and therefore he was capable of universal conquest. His plan was a success. The war spirit ran high. All except Artabanus, his uncle, a brave and prudent prince, favored the immediate invasion of Greece. They boasted that the Persian soldier was invincible, and that triumph would be sure and speedy.

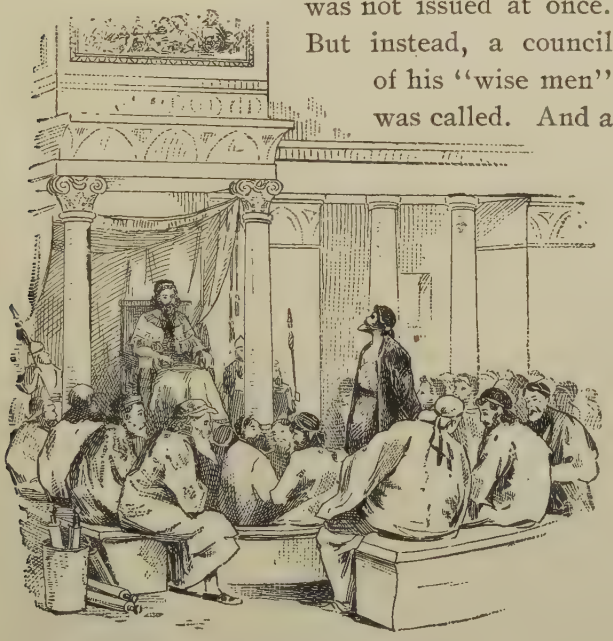
"On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine," he thought to dazzle his drunken associates with the beauty of Queen Vashti. Swift messengers order her at once to present herself in regal robes, with the "crown royal" upon her head. At the time of the summons she was presiding at a feast of the women. It came as a thunderbolt to her pure, modest heart. To obey was to violate a law of custom, hoary with the age of a thousand years. This unwritten law said no woman must thus

exhibit herself, and had even beautiful Vashti obeyed the king, she would no longer have been regarded as a virtuous matron. And not only would she have been disgraced, but her royal husband would have shared her dishonor. Xerxes in his sober moments would have issued no such order. But wine was in and wit was out, and the husband would degrade even the wife that he loves.

Poor Vashti is face to face with a trying dilemma. What can she do? The king is not in the habit of being disobeyed. He is an absolute monarch, and none dare defy his will. His power of life and death in one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, peopled by millions of subjects, is undisputed. To defy him is to lose her crown, and probably her life; to obey is to forfeit her character; and the brave heroine, with a wisdom and courage worthy of all imitation, decides to let the crown, and if need be, the head that wore it, both go, and cling to her character.

The messengers return, but Vashti is not with them. The king is amazed. He never dreamed that she would dare disobey him, for she knew him, and understood what he was

when his own "sweet will" was opposed. And his courtiers knew him, too, and they must have been surprised that an order for her execution was not issued at once. But instead, a council of his "wise men" was called. And a



THE COUNCIL OF "WISE MEN."

delicate duty was theirs. Seldom are counselors surrounded by more perplexing circumstances. If they justify the act of the queen they imperil their own lives. If they condemn

it, they fear to advise the death penalty, for the king loves his beautiful wife ardently. And if he should spare her in spite of their advice, then their lives are in danger from her. Their solution of the dilemma, under all the circumstances, was full of worldly wisdom. They decide to spare her life, but to strip her of all power to harm them. Memucan, speaking for them, said:

"Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people in all the provinces of king Xerxes, for this deed of the queen shall come abroad to all women, so that they shall despise their husbands when it shall be reported king Xerxes commanded Vashti the queen to be brought before him, but she came not. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Xerxes, and let the king give her royal estate

to another that is better than she. And when the king's decree shall be published throughout all his empire, all the wives shall give their husbands honor, both to great and small." The decision was indorsed by Xerxes, and letters were sent "into all the king's provinces that every man should bear rule in his own home."

Here we pause in our study that we may gather some practical lessons for our own lives. We learn first of the dangers of unholy ambition. Although Xerxes inherited the largest and most powerful empire of the world, he was not satisfied. His boundless ambition looked and leaped beyond his more than one hundred provinces, much of which he had never seen, and his millions of subjects, only a few of whom he could ever know. His pent-up domains are too small. His nobles are assembled at that great feast. For one hundred and eighty days they consult and plan, and finally decide that beautiful and famous Greece shall be added to his realms. The king's heart leaps for joy. Another star is to glitter in his crown, and more fame is to be connected with his name. What

cares he for widowed wives and childless mothers? What cares he for the fathers, sons, husbands and brothers who will be slain? What cares he for devastated fields, wasted wealth, and broken hearts? What cares he for seas of blood, if only he can ride on the crimson tide to greater glory? But it is only a few days till his proud heart is crushed, and his bright hope is blighted. His vast army is repulsed and hurled back into Asia, while its king, by forced marches, far in advance, crosses the Hellespont at night, and re-enters Shushan, covered with defeat and shame. And sooner or later all such ambitions must fail. As it was with Xerxes, so it was with Herod, and so it was with Napoleon, and so it will be with all.

"What is ambition? 'Tis a glorious cheat!
It hath no features. In its face is set
A mirror, and the gazer sees his own.
It looks a god, but it is like himself:
It hath a mien majestical, and smiles
Bewilderingly sweet—but how like him!
And what is its reward? At best a name!
Praise—when the ear has grown too dull to hear it;
Gold—when the senses it should please are dead;
Wreaths—when the hair they cover has grown gray;
Fame—when the heart it should have thrilled is numb;
All things but love, when love is all we want;

And close behind comes Death, and ere we know
He sends us, stripped and naked, to the tomb."

We learn also of the dangers of wine. If the king had not been "merry with wine," he would not have attempted the disgrace of his loved queen. This is the same old story. Most of the sorrow and shame of the world is traceable to the door of wine. With its strong arm it strikes down nations. Egypt's monuments tell of a drunken people. China, long before the birth of Jesus, reeled and staggered under its blow. India shared in a similar shame. Assyria worshiped at the shrine of Bacchus. Babylon fell because her defenders were drunk. Rome's power was paralyzed by drink. Palestine even has not escaped the scourge. England, France, Germany, Russia, and our own beloved America are now in peril. It invades and pollutes the sacred shrine of home. Peace, purity and happiness are banished. The husband becomes a demon and the wife a demoness. Bread is snatched from the mouths of hungry children, clothes are torn from their shivering bodies, their childish laughter is changed into wailing, their round faces are pinched and shriveled, their bright

eyes are dimmed with tears, their rosy cheeks lose their tint, the fire is smothered on the hearth, and these helpless and hopeless little ones are sent into the streets in mid-winter to beg bread. It strikes down our best young men. It attacks him with the fury of a fiend. It destroys his health of body. The blood loses its purity, the nerves their steadiness, the step its elasticity, the eye its sparkle, and the tongue its rich, round tones. It destroys his health of mind. The judgment loses its accuracy, and reason its power, and in thought, though not in purity, he becomes a child again. It destroys his health of soul. The conscience is blunted, the affections are poisoned, the finer sensibilities lose their delicacy, the soul is seared as with a hot iron, and God's child is alienated from his Father, and begins the long leap down into the deep black gulf of perdition.

For this awful curse is there a remedy? Yes; it is in total abstinence. Turn from it as you would from a viper. Ostracize it as you would a leper. Let it have no place in the home except as a medicine. Tear it from your cook-books, and let not your children inhale its flavor with their food. Banish it from the cel-

lar and sideboards. Let it have no place in the punch-bowl at your receptions. Always and everywhere shun it, denounce it, and fight it as the relentless foe of God and man.

We learn once more a lesson from the contrast of feasts. This wonderful feast of Xerxes is a fit type of the feasts of this world. For one hundred and eighty days the reins of revelry were loosed, and for awhile all went merry as a marriage bell. But as time wore away the keen relish with which it began was exchanged for a sense of oppressive surfeiting. And long since it has come to an end, and all the vast multitudes who shared its pleasures have gone to a land where such pleasures are unknown.

Christianity is a feast also. But unlike this one, it grows better as the years go by, and it is commensurate with eternity. It is a mistake to think that God would have his children sad and sorrowful all their lives, comforted only with the thought that it will be better by-and-by. It is a mistake to think that he wants his army half clad and half fed, to march with bleeding feet while fighting earth's battles, comforted only by the thought that a crown and a scepter await each valiant soldier in the

land beyond the skies. If he had not wanted us to be happy we would not have been created with a capacity and desire for happiness. He would have painted the sky black instead of blue, the stars somber instead of bright, the birds voiceless instead of full of song, and the flowers without beauty or perfume.

"The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets
Before we reach the heavenly fields, or walk its golden streets."

Standing at the mouth of the Amazon, gazing on its wonderful width of one hundred and eighty miles, we realize that it has been flowing on for all the years, watering the fields, and slaking the thirst of man and beast, and yet there is no sign of want or waste. On the other hand, the farther it flows the wider and deeper it grows until it is lost in the great ocean beyond. So it is with the Christian life; it is small now; but as the years come and go it becomes richer and sweeter and deeper and wider till it is swallowed up in the ocean of God's love. The Father still keeps the best wine for the last.

II.

ESTHER ENTHRONED.

Esther 2:1-23.

BEFORE resuming the thread of our story we must turn aside and, in the light of profane history, note an important event in the life of Xerxes. The great feast is over, and the sound of revelry gives place to the tramp of soldiers, and the invasion of Greece is begun. At the head of an army of five millions—the largest in history—he begins his mad march. Reaching the territory now known as Turkey, he manifests this madness. Mount Athos, a lofty mountain, projecting into the sea and terminating in a dangerous promontory, had caused the loss of many a noble ship. To avoid this danger he ordered a canal cut through the mountain. Before beginning the work he addressed the mountain thus:

"Athos, I advise thee not to be so audacious as to put rocks which cannot be cut in the way of my workmen. If thou do I will cut thee entirely down, and cast thee headlong into the

sea." In this vain boast he would impress his soldiers that even nature was subject to him.

The winter is spent in Sardis, and in the spring the campaign is inaugurated with a grand review. From a lofty white marble throne, erected for the purpose, he scans his thousands of ships riding the Hellespont, and his millions of the land forces. While looking at this scene he burst into tears. His uncle, Artabanes, astonished, asked why he wept. His answer was: "Why not weep? Consider the extreme brevity of human life. In less than a century all these will have passed away."

The Hellespont is in his way, and he orders his engineers to span it with a bridge. As if by magic the bridge leaps into place, but is soon torn away by a storm. The foolish king orders the waters scourged, and then makes a speech to them:

"Troublesome element, thus does thy master chastise thee for having affronted him without reason. Know that Xerxes shall pass over thy waters in spite of thy billows."

A second bridge is completed, and his army passes over in safety, and soon the battle begins. At Thermopylæ, a narrow mountain

pass, he meets Leonidas and his three hundred brave Spartans. Fighting for liberty and home, and inspired with the courage of desperation, they fight as few men ever fought, and when night draws her dark curtain over the bloody field only one of their number is left, while twenty thousand Persians, eloquent though silent testimonials of their valor, lie dead before him. Such dauntless heroism naturally aroused all Greece, and soon she was one continuous military camp. The Persians swept on into the very heart of the country, leaving desolation and ruin in their wake. Athens is deserted, and all seems lost. But at Salamis the Greeks are massing for a mighty struggle. The day of destiny dawns. Each army is in battle array. Xerxes, confident, is seated on an elevated throne, overlooking the field, that he may be an eye-witness to the triumph of his troops. The fatal hour comes. The dogs of war are loosed. The shock is fearful, but brief. In a few hours the Grecian fleet of three hundred and eighty vessels has shattered, captured or put to flight Persia's fleet of ten thousand ships. Xerxes reads his doom, and at once begins his hurried flight. With a few companions he flies

back to the Hellespont lest his bridge be destroyed, and never stops till he is safe within the walls of Shushan.

With this necessary digression we are now ready to take up the thread of our story. It has been about four years since the banishment of Vashti. But she is still queen, though crownless, for the king loves her, and she reigns in the halls of his sad memory. He feels that he was cruel and hasty in her banishment, and wishes she were back again. He has done her an irreparable injury, and filled his own soul with sorrow. His anger has subsided, and his old love has revived. His keen-eyed and cruel-hearted servants see the situation, and fear that he may ignore the laws of the Medes and the Persians, and recall her. The man who could lecture a mountain and lash the sea is equal to this; hence their suggestion that "fair young virgins" from all the provinces be brought before the king that he may choose a successor for Vashti. They trembled at the thought of her restoration, for then their punishment would be sure and swift. And they seemed to realize "the expulsive power of a new affection." Their

suggestion pleased the king, and it was so ordered.

Mordecai now appears on the stage. Like Daniel, though a captive in a foreign land, he was true to his people and loyal to his God. He is a man of fine character. His judgment is good, his courage is faultless, his tact is keen, his patriotism is pure, his sympathy is tender, and his faith never wavered. He believed that God would rescue his people. Just how it would be done he did not know, but that it would be done in some way he never for a moment doubted. But that for which he is best remembered is his kindness to a little orphan girl, a cousin, whose father and mother were dead. Some might call this a little thing, but God would call it large. Sowing is greater than reaping, though, as it often is, it be done in tears, while the reaping is amid the glad shouts of the harvest home. Mordecai is now sowing. Watch and see what the harvest will be, for surely God will not forget such a sower as this—one who hears and heeds the orphan's cry. Without the hope of reward, and blind to all her future glory, he is true to the claims of kindred and the dictates of humanity, and

takes the lonely child to his own home, and becomes to her a second father, and she to him a loving daughter.

But in the levy of maiden tribute her beauty was her danger, as it has been in a thousand other cases, and she was chosen to compete before the king. Some so little appreciate the character of noble Mordecai as to say her selection was the result of his diplomacy; and others, that Esther consented and approved the choice. Both views are too absurd and unjust to merit attention. The awful fact is that neither Mordecai nor Esther was consulted. Everything belonged to the king, and he could levy on a human life as upon anything else. So she was torn from her home and taken to Shushan, and placed in "the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women," whose heart she won, and who bestowed special favors on her and her maidens. And as the long months of preparation for meeting the king went by, "Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house," in which his darling was a prisoner, "to know how Esther did, and what should become of her." Her own father could not have been more devoted, or felt a deeper

interest in the child. And this devotion was fully reciprocated, for Esther still "did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him."

But the days of preparation are passed, and the day of separation comes, when one of these charming maidens is to be chosen to take the place of Vashti. One by one they are presented to Xerxes, till finally Esther is ushered into his royal presence. The king was an easy captive to the charms of the beautiful Jewish maiden, for "he loved Esther above all the women, so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti."

The marriage was one of magnificence and splendor. A great feast followed, known as "Esther's feast," at which nobles, princes, conquerors and other great men vied with each other in honoring the king and his lovely young queen. And the glad occasion was further emphasized by the king in dispensing royal favors and bounties with a lavish hand, for "he made a release to the prisoners, and gave gifts according to the state of the king."

During this time "Mordecai sat in the king's gate," some position of vigilant trust, and he

discovered a plot to assassinate the king. "Bigthan and Teresh, of those who kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on

ESTHER CROWNED.

the king." Mordecai reported this treachery to Esther, and "they were both hanged on a tree," and the faithfulness of Mordecai "was written in the Book of Chronicles before the king." Let us not forget this incident, for like that of caring for the little orphan girl, it is

destined to play an important part in this thrilling drama.

Here we pause for the present that we may gather some practical lessons. And the first shall be our duty to the orphan. Nothing in the life of Mordecai will live longer or shine brighter than his adoption of this orphan child. And nothing in time or in eternity will be to him a source of sweeter memories. Esther received much in this unselfish deed, but Mordecai more, for it is always true that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Like the poor, we have these orphans ever with us, and how piteous and powerful the plea they make. How unspeakably sad the lot of a little child robbed in infancy of father and mother, and thrown as a helpless waif on the cold bosom of the world. Whose heart so hard as not to be touched and tendered by such a sight? Christianity has done much in this direction, but there remains yet much more to be done. Orphan asylums all over the land, and thousands of private homes like that of Mordecai, are trophies of its sweet spirit. Let the good work go on until no child for which the Saviour died shall be denied

the protection of a father's strong arm and a mother's tender love. Let the Mordecais be as numerous as the Esthers.

A second lesson is that of consecrated beauty. The beauty of Esther won her crown, but the heart of Esther consecrated it to the salvation of her race. Had her beauty been less, the crown would have been lost, and had her heart been bad it would have been abused. A beautiful but bad woman has been called "the hell of the soul, the purgatory of the purse, and the paradise of the eyes." Medusa's beauty excited the envy of Minerva, who transformed her into a frightful monster. Her ringlets became hissing serpents, and no living thing could look upon her without being turned into stone; and all about her cavern home could be seen the stony figures of men and animals which had caught a glimpse of her and been petrified by the sight.

The names of our heroine emphasize this lesson. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, "myrtle," an evergreen, suggests perennial beauty. The evergreen knows no seasons, but cheers both summer and winter alike. It is seen in adversity as in prosperity, in shadow as in

shine. Her Persian name, "star," suggests brightness. The star shines because the sun bathes it in light. And beauty bathed in the light of heaven will glow like the stars, but unlike them, will shine on forever. God loves the beautiful. It is the fringe of His garment, the reflection of His nature, and it can never die. The richest beauty in the world is the beauty of character coupled with beauty of form and features. False beauty is like summer fruit, easy to corrupt and quick to fade; like the dewdrop, exquisitely beautiful, but at the slightest touch is gone forever. How powerful the church would be if all her beautiful faces and forms were equally favored in beauty of heart. Wine would be banished from the home and the feast, the standard of morality would be the same for both sexes, and the church would be more attractive than the ball-room or theater.

The third lesson concerns the harem of Xerxes. The heart of every true man is stirred to its deepest depths as he sees these pure, innocent girls taken into the harem of the king. But let us in our bitter denunciation be careful "lest we find ourselves in the same condemnation." Mormonism we regard as our national

shame, and so it is. And God can never make of us the people we should be till the black blot is wiped from our escutcheon, till the fair valley in which it is entrenched is cleansed of its deadly malaria by the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness. But how we are handicapped in our battle with this evil while a kindred wickedness is licensed in our cities and winked at in many of our homes. We turn in loathing from a murderer; why not from an adulterer? His crime is greater, because a life of shame is worse than a death of virtue; and the death of the soul is infinitely worse than the death of the body. What father would not prefer a thousand-fold to see a dagger buried in his daughter's heart, and to see her white hands folded over her pure bosom, and then, if need be, with his own hands open the grave and lay her away to rest, than see her meet a fate like this? I appeal to every man who reads these lines to declare relentless war against this modern harem. For the sake of the nation, the home, the sister, the mother, the wife, the daughter; for the sake of good morals, for the sake of the church, for the sake of the souls of men, for the sake of our Lord and Savior Jesus

Christ, for the sake of the pure and holy in earth and in heaven, let the war never end till our globe is purged of this foul blight.

A last lesson is on repentance. Xerxes was sorry for the sin of driving Vashti from the palace. And if he had been a true man he would have ignored the foolish myth of the unchangeableness of the Medo-Persian laws, and recalled her, and at her feet would have confessed his sin and obtained forgiveness. There would have been nothing base or bitter in this, but rather good rising out of evil. Some plants of bitterest root have the whitest and sweetest blossoms; and so some of the deepest sorrows produce the truest repentance. But not so with Xerxes. His penitence began and ended in sorrow; it never rose above its roots and bloomed into the rich fruit of reformation.

Be careful that Satan does not deceive you as to the nature of true repentance. He knows too well the value of this precious grace not to invent a dangerous imitation. Wherever there is good coin there will also be counterfeits. His counterfeit for repentance is sorrow, tears, regrets, and even anguish, but no reformation—such as Herod had, who, though he was sorry,

yet he beheaded John the Baptist; and such as the thief has behind the bars, sorry that he has been overtaken, but no purpose of reform. But if we turn to God in true penitence, however dark the sin, he will forgive, and receive us like the sea receives the bather, only to make us purer and whiter than when we came.

III.

THE DECREE OF DEATH.

Esther 3:1-15.

A NEW character appears in our plot. He is Haman the Agagite. This term Agagite probably connects him with the Amalekites, the old-time enemies of the Jews. From some unknown cause, like Joseph in Egypt, he is raised to the second place in the kingdom. But he was unworthy of this elevation, for he is filled with vanity and vengeance, two elements with which true greatness cannot exist. But the darlings of princes, like their masters, are not always worthies.

He was a strange character religiously. He was not an atheist, with no God; neither was he a polytheist, with many gods; but he was a monotheist, with but one god, and that god was self, and never did a god have a more constant or devoted worshiper. All must burn incense *to* this god, or they would be burned *by* him.

But brave Mordecai would not burn the incense. Vashti had defied the king and lost her

crown, and Mordecai knew it, and yet he will not burn it. As we behold him standing there, devout and defiant, we are at a loss which to admire more, his courage as a man or his loyalty as a saint.

HAUGHTY HAMAN.

The "king's servants were astounded" that Mordecai would not bow before Haman, and they asked him, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" For a number of days Mordecai gave them no answer. They reported his conduct to Haman, to see if "Mordecai's matters would stand;" i. e., to see if he would permit the defiance of this Jew. Haman's wrath is aroused, and he determines on vengeance. One whispered

hiss reaches the great (?) man's ears, and drowns the hozannas of the multitude. His pride chafes under the stroke, and his eyes flash fire. If Mordecai will not *bow* in worship, he shall *hang* in derision. Yea, more; his whole hated race, in spite of their honorable record of twenty centuries, shall go with him. Thousands must die because one refuses to bend the knee to Xerxes' prime minister. "He thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone." The slaying of one poor Jew is too small a matter for his majesty. Nothing short of the extinction of a nation will heal his wounded pride. Poor, short-sighted mortal! Little did he think he was now standing on the verge of a volcano destined to destroy himself instead of others; that he was to erect a gallows on which not Mordecai, but Haman was to hang.

But so great an undertaking must be carefully planned, and it must have the sanction of religion. A lucky day must be had for the massacre, and to find it he resorts to Pur, i. e., the casting of lots. M. Dienlafoy says: "Among the objects found in the deep excavation of the Memnomium (palace of Susa) is a quadrangular prism, each side measuring a centimeter, and

the length four and a half centimeters. On the rectangular faces are engraved four different numbers—one, two, five, six. Throw the prism, and it must stand on an even or an uneven number. The Persians love games of chance as much as wine. May not the little Susian relic be one of their dice? And may not their dice, under the name of Pur, have been used to consult the fates and try fortunes?"

In this, or in some kindred way, the day is selected, and it is the thirteenth of the twelfth month, almost a year away. "Truly the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing of it is with the Lord." (Prov. 16:33.) Here is God's hand, though his name is not seen; for if the time had been less, Mordecai could not have matured his plans, and the Jews would have been unprepared. But it is put so far forward that all needed time is given. It not only comes near the close of the year, but it is in the *fourth* year of Esther's reign, giving her ample opportunity to gain such an influence over king and people as to be of the greatest possible service to her race. As Henry quaintly says, "The lot broke the neck of the plot." The remedy was ready before the disease broke out. Our God is

never behind time. The hour of need is the hour of help. A life of trust is a life of triumph. The world is drowned, but not till the ark is finished. The disciples are about to sink beneath the waves, but the Savior comes in time to save. Herod, to please the Jews, would behead Peter, but the angel of deliverance is too swift for his axe.

The day of execution fixed, Haman next seeks the endorsement of the king. And that there may be no failure, he conceals his design under the cloak of patriotism, and mixes just enough truth with his falsehood to make it dangerous. His speech shows him an artful enemy, not only wicked, but wise. Hear it:

"And Haman said unto King Xerxes, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy people; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasuries."

Now let us study this artful speech. 1.

"There is a certain people." Why not call them by name? Why refer to them as "a certain people"? Is it because he knows not their name? or is it because he would not pollute his holy (?) lips by pronouncing it? His vile aim thus appeals to ridicule, and he would hurl contempt upon a people whose remarkable history covered a period of two thousand years. How like the enemies of Christ, who would not pronounce his name, but said, "We know that God spake unto Moses; as for this fellow, we know not whence he is." 2. Why say they "are scattered abroad?" etc. Evidently to make the impression that the hand of God was against them, and therefore they were homeless wanderers in the world. 3. Why charge that "their laws are diverse from all people?" They were a captive people, and hence had no laws except their religious laws. Why not tell the truth, and say this? 4. "Neither keep they the king's laws." There is no evidence of their insubordination. On the other hand, they are proverbial as law-keepers. 5. "Therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." This is his climax, and never did speaker approach a climax with more care and skill. He

knows Xerxes, and he knows how selfish and sordid he is. If he can make him see that it will be to his "profit" to slay them, they will be slain. He cares nothing for blood, if only his coffers can be filled. 6. But Haman is not done yet. He would make security doubly secure. Lest the king should hesitate to exterminate so many subjects, famous for thrift, and therefore good tax-payers, he offers to "pay ten thousand talents of silver ($20,000,000) into the king's treasuries." This he could well afford to do, for in the massacre he could steal double that amount.

The king, with Oriental courtesy, while appearing to ignore it, accepts the bribe, and gives to Haman his signet ring by which to authenticate any decree he may choose to prepare. This was the usual custom among the rulers of that time and place. Ignorance was so common, even among the ruling classes, that most of the kings and princes were unable to write their names, and hence this method of affixing their signatures.

The decree is written in more than twenty languages, and sent rapidly into all the provinces of the empire. A more heartless decree

the world has never seen. It gave authority "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." No consideration of age or sex would avail. The little babe in its mother's arms, and the strong man in the vigor of life; small children, incapable of crime, and the old man tottering on the verge of the grave; stalwart manhood and feeble women,—all of every class were to die.

So horrid and inhuman is this edict that good men have doubted its reality, arguing that human nature is incapable of such cruelty. And if this were the only case of the kind this conclusion would be generally accepted. But alas! such is not the case. History is full of them. Nero lighted his gardens by burning Christians wrapped in pitch, and in the glare he fiddled while Rome was burning. "Bloody Mary" was another Nero in female form. Her history might be written in the blood she shed. Cortes, in Mexico, practiced all manner of treachery and brutality, while pretending to try to convert the people to Christianity. His crimes against the good and gifted Montezuma

are enough almost to make one regret that he belongs to the race of man. St. Bartholomew's day, Aug. 21, 1572, only about 400 years ago, was as black in fact as Haman's was in design. "His Most Christian Majesty," Charles IX., invites his Protestant subjects to the marriage of the Protestant king of Navarre to the king's sister. At a given signal the great bell of the palace sounds, and is answered by all the bells of the churches. All understand the signal except the doomed. The assassins, led by the priests with a crucifix in one hand and a sword in the other, rush upon the unsuspecting and defenseless Protestants and slaughter them. The streets run with blood, and the approach to the palace is glutted with the dead and dying. From a window in the king's palace, his voice, clear and strong, is heard above the tumult of slaughter, the curses of the soldiers, and the groans of the dying, shouting, "Slay them! Slay them!" A few find their way into the palace and plead before the king for mercy, reminding him of his promised protection, and he answers their prayer by plunging his own sword into their bosoms, and crying, "No quarter; slay all!" The dawn of the following day

revealed a scene in Paris at which demons might almost weep. Streets and sidewalks are red with blood, and the bodies of the dead make it almost impossible to pass. Carts are gathering them and dumping them into the river. Terror is written on the faces of the few living Protestants, while joy lights up the countenances of the Catholics. The king, wild with delight, sends a special message to the Pope, saying, "Tell him the Seine flows more majestically after receiving the dead bodies of the heretics." And the Pope and his cardinals solemnly return thanks for their destruction, and a medal is struck to commemorate the awful deed, and a picture of the scene is painted, which to-day adorns the walls of the Vatican. Surely the cruelty of Haman was not worse than this.

The last postman is gone, and Xerxes and Haman sat down to drink; "but the city of Shushan was perplexed." Revelry in the palace, but misery in the cottage. The wine of joy for the king, but the gall of bitterness for his subjects. The song of pleasure for the throne, but the wails of mourning in the home. Thus did Joseph's brethren when they had

cast him into the pit. They sat down to eat when they should have wept for their wickedness. They feasted in joy when they should have fasted in sorrow.

But here we drop the thread of our story and gather a few of its lessons. The first is littleness in the life of Haman. He was so devoid of greatness and goodness that even the honors and obligations of Prime Minister of this great kingdom were forgotten when a single Jew refused to do him honor. The world has had many great men, but not one of them permitted pride and vengeance to rule and reign in his heart. A life where these are the dominant passions must be a small life. And but for their presence in the bosom of Haman he would scarcely have noticed the act of Mordecai. And when once he learned that this act was the result of his conscientious convictions, he would have respected it, however little he admired his judgment. But instead, he made of the mole-hill a mountain, and brooded over the slight to his dignity till he determined on revenge; and in order to his vengeance he will falsify to the

king, and for the offense of one will murder an entire nation.

A second lesson is loyalty in the life of Mordecai. His associates in the gate bowed to Haman according to the king's command, and they were astonished that he did not, and they expostulated with him, and finally learned that his refusal grew out of the fact that he was a Jew, and he would be loyal to his God, whatever the cost. The Persian king was regarded an incarnation of Ahura-Mazda, and therefore entitled to divine honors, and the act of bowing to him was an act of worship. To bow to Haman, his representative, would be to worship the king, and Mordecai as a Jew could not, and would not do it. The idea of the unchangeableness of their laws was the result of the divine in their kings. A divine king must not change a law, for in so doing he denies his divinity by admitting himself capable of a mistake. This noble deed of Mordecai places him in company with Daniel, who, rather than worship the king's image, went into the lions' den; with the Hebrew children, who, from the same cause, braved the dangers of a fiery furnace; with John the Baptist, who, at the cost of his

head, was true to his God; with Peter and John, who, in the face of death declared, "We ought to obey God rather than man;" and with that long list of martyrs who valued loyalty above life, and whose blood so richly watered the seed of the church in the day of her persecution. This is the only true life, and God will see that sooner or later it succeeds. When the stars, like sparks from God's anvil, leaped forth into their vast orbits, not knowing which way to go, had they felt like men, they might have been discouraged. But their king, the Sun, did not forget them, but without arms or hands held them in their places while they whirled through space; without bit or bridle, as so many unharnessed, fiery steeds, he reins them in the way without a single misstep, and he will complete the journey without a wanderer. If the sun can and does do this, will not his Maker guard and guide his children, who, like faithful Mordecai, commit all to his care?

A third lesson is from the parallel between the order for this heartless and wholesale slaughter and the liquor license of to-day. Some one has noted the following striking resemblances. 1. It was granted by the sovereign power of the State.

So is the liquor license. 2. The privilege was confined to the few. So is the liquor license. 3. Liberty was given to destroy the lives of the people. So with the liquor license. 4. It was done for a money consideration. So is the liquor license. 5. But much more than the cost of the privilege was to be taken from the people. So is the liquor license. 6. It was an injury to the State that granted it. So is the liquor license. 7. It brought ruin to Haman who exercised it. So does the liquor license. 8. But Mordecai, Esther and God were against it, and it was defeated. And so it will be with the liquor license.

The liquor business is doomed. Let us set our faces like flint against it, lest we be doomed also.

IV.

THE PLOT DISCOVERED.

Esther 4; 1-17.

THE "posts" had verified the proverb that "nothing travels so fast as a Persian messenger," and the decree of death was known throughout the kingdom, and sorrow was heard everywhere. But the most sorrowful of them all must have been Mordecai. He knew it was his act in refusing to bow to Haman that had brought on all this trouble. He could not upbraid himself for having done wrong; neither was he afraid to die for his principles; and yet, as he remembered that he, as an individual, was the sole cause of all this distress, his sadness must have been peculiarly painful.

Wrapped in sackcloth he wanders here and there, and finally comes to the king's gate; but he could not enter. No one could come near the Persian palace wearing the look or dress of a mourner. Posing as a god, the king surrounded himself with every luxury for the appetite, with dazzling splendor for the eye, with

sweet music for the ear, with fawning courtiers to flatter his pride, thus foolishly fancying that he could escape the troubles of ordinary mortals. Regarding himself as a god, his palace must be glad, not sad. But sorrow did enter that palace; and not only sorrow, but death; for one of his courtiers murdered him while he slept. If we cannot keep sorrow and death out of our homes, and we cannot, we would better let "the God of all comfort" in.

Bad news flies on the wings of the wind, and Esther's maids soon tell her of the sadness of her uncle. They must have known of their relationship, or they would not have reported so trifling a thing as a man weeping on the streets, to the queen. "Then was the queen exceedingly grieved." The sad news, like an arrow, pierced her tender heart. She is grieved at his garments of sackcloth, and sends him "raiment" to take its place. Her exaltation has not corrupted her nature, or dried up the fountain of her affections. She still has the same sympathetic heart she used to have when together they lived in their little cottage home, and she is as anxious to dry his tears as she ever was.

But Mordecai declines the raiment, and Esther understands his trouble is serious, and she would know all about it. She calls Hatach, her trusted chamberlain, and sends him to know "what it was, and why it was." He hastens away, and in a few moments the two are in close and confidential conference. The picture has changed. Mordecai is no longer tracing the streets and attracting the attention of the people by his garb and wailings. There he stands earnestly and eloquently talking to the queen's representative. It must have been a strange sight to see a representative from the palace standing on the street talking to a Jew. And if the people had known what was to be the outcome of this conference, they might well have marked it as an epoch in their history. The finding of a little babe in a basket on the Nile was apparently a small thing. But that babe became the first great emancipator, leader and law-giver of the world. And fifteen centuries later, when another child was found in a manger at Bethlehem, the world saw nothing in it except a pathetic scene in connection with a birth among the poor. But that Babe was to emancipate, not the Jew only, but all men, and

not from the fetters of the body, but from the bondage of sin, and was to become the spiritual leader and law-giver, who is able to ransom from the grave and save in heaven.

"And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave him the copy of the decree given at Shushan, to show it unto Esther, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king to make supplication for the people. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai."

This is a marvelous story brought back by Hatach, and it proves that "truth is stranger than fiction;" and the queen, pure and good, might well hesitate to believe that a plot so dark and demon-like could originate in a human heart. But when she read the decree, with all its details, and saw the seal of the signet ring, she could doubt no longer.

But she sends Hatach again to Mordecai, giving two reasons why she should not go in "unto the king to make supplication for the people." The first is based on one of the unchangeable laws of the palace which forbade any one un-

bidden to approach the monarch. The penalty in such a case was death, except when the golden scepter was extended to the intruder. Her second reason was of a domestic character. She had not been called into the presence of the king for thirty days. The ardor of this fickle lover had apparently cooled. The beautiful toy which pleased him for awhile seemed to have lost its charms. And if she has lost her influence over him for herself, how can she influence him for others? The prospect, therefore, was not only death, but it was a fruitless death. She shows herself wise and prudent. She is not afraid to do her duty, however difficult and dangerous; neither is she blind to the obstacles in her way.

Mordecai hears her reasons, and answers them in a masterly manner. Let us study carefully his answer. 1. He first appeals to her selfishness. "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews." This shows a fine knowledge of human nature. If we can convince another that his interests are identical with ours, he is likely to aid us. His argument is: *You* need not expect to escape. If your nationality is not already

known, some one will be sure to reveal it, and you will die with your race. Your own safety, therefore, is involved in the safety of your people, and you should make an immediate effort to save them. 2. His second appeal is to her ambition: "If thou holdest thy peace at this time, then shall enlargement and deliverance come to the Jews from another place." The honor and glory of saving a nation is now within your reach. Accept it, or it shall be given another. And your name, now honored by all, will become a synonym for heartlessness and cowardice. 3. His third appeal is to her faith: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Your life has been remarkable. Belonging to a despised people, born in exile and in bondage, and reared in orphanage, yet you have been raised to the throne of the mightiest empire on the globe. This cannot be an accident. God's hand is in it. He wants you for some great emergency, and that emergency is now at hand.

What a speech is this! It ranks with the great speeches of the world. And what faith this man has! It is the kind that removes mountains and overcomes the world. It pierces

the gloom about him and gives him light from above. In the clouds which to others were altogether dark, it discovers a rift. He knew the decree of death was from one to whom blood was as water, and whose laws were unalterable. But he also knew that God reigned, and he was familiar with his covenant promises, and with the trust of a little child he believed they would be fulfilled.

> "Faith, bold faith the promise sees,
> And trusts to that alone;
> Laughs at impossibilities,
> And says it shall be done."

Mordecai's appeal was not in vain. It cleared the way for Esther, and steadied her staggering step. But before she goes in unto the king she and all her people must go before God and ask his guidance and protection. So Hatach bears back to Mordecai this message: "Gather all the Jews that dwell in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." Brave, trustful, patriotic, sympathetic woman! God cannot fail you!

Here we pause, and turn from this most fascinating story to gather for ourselves a few of its lessons. We learn, first to be faithful in lowly spheres. Hatach's life was a modest one, and the records say but little of him. But he was faithful. And as we watch the development of this wonderful drama, we cannot see how it could have succeeded without him. Many of the great events of history hinge on the fidelity of some faithful soul in a humble sphere. The battle cannot be won unless the courier is bold enough to bear the orders of his commanders to the hottest part of the field. If the messenger is not faithful, the message of the statesman or diplomat will miscarry, and the interests of an empire will suffer. If the errand boy is careless, the physician will not receive the call in time to save the loved one from the grave. Therefore if we cannot be an Esther, with a crown on our brow, or a Mordecai, with wisdom sufficient to counsel a queen, we can at least be a Hatach, faithful in the lowly sphere to which God has called us.

We learn again how to get comfort in the hour of trial. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." He enters the world with

a cry, and goes out with a groan. None can rise so high as to be above it, or sink so low as to be beneath it. Mordecai and Esther had cups of sorrow, full and bitter. The Savior was "the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." It darkens alike the palace and the cottage. It hushes the notes of joy about the throne, and it fills the house with sighing. It wrings tears from the old man's heart, and stops the merry laughter of childhood. But in the midst of it all, man is not left comfortless. 1. It is a comfort to know that threatened troubles do not always come. Most of our fears are without foundation. Every cloud which darkens the heavens does not drench the earth in rain. The women worried about the stone at the sepulcher, but it was gone when they reached there. And the trouble which these Jews feared was never fully realized. 2. It is a comfort to know that sorrows are often freighted with good. The trials of Mordecai and Esther developed in them that which makes their names immortal, and which still sends out from them a sweet fragrance like unto that from crushed roses. Even the "Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffer-

ing." 3. It is a comfort to know that God can deliver us from all our sorrows. Mordecai's trouble was not the fancy of a disordered brain. It was real—awfully real. The decree had been issued. The death-warrant had been signed and sealed. And to all human appearance he and his people were as really doomed as any man who ever died on the scaffold. But Jehovah, in a wonderful way, saved them.

A final lesson teaches us the value of opportunity. Perhaps no queen ever had such an opportunity as Esther's, and it only came to her once. She was wise enough to see it, and great enough to improve it, and thus she becomes a queen indeed. Had she faltered and failed her name would have been a hissing and by-word, instead of being wreathed as it is to-day in the fadeless garlands of the world's affection. She came to the throne not so much for her own good as for the good of others. Her crown, like all crowns, brought both honor and responsibility. In the light of this, what shall be said of our crowns? for we all have crowns of some kind. Some of us are crowned with wealth. Shall we use it for our own comfort and ease? or, as wise stewards, shall we use it for the good

of others and the glory of God? Some are crowned with talent. Shall we use this glorious gift in securing fame among men? or shall we not devote it to the work of teaching the world the true wisdom of God? Some are crowned with the power to sing. Shall this rare gift be given to the stage rather than the church? Shall it be addressed to the ear rather than the heart? All of us are crowned with Gospel privileges. Shall we selfishly shut them up in our hearts? or shall we receive them in trust for others? These precious opportunities come to us all. They are like open gates into elysian fields. If we improve them, they lift us into the skies. If we abuse them, they drag us down to death.

This lesson should apply to us as a religious people with peculiar force. God has opened to us the opportunity of restoring primitive Christianity. We seem to have been called to the throne for this specific purpose. His people were divided into a thousand hostile factions. Creeds from human brains had largely displaced the Bible as the rule of faith and practice; and theological speculations, rather than faith in a personal Savior, had become tests of fellowship,

and were even proclaimed as the basis of their union. In the midst of this medley of voices and confusion, the Campbells appeared. With the olive branch of peace in one hand and the Bible in the other, they began their plea for a return to apostolic precept and practice,—a union of God's people on his word. Their battle cry was: "Where the Bible speaks we speak, and where the Bible is silent we are silent." And God has blessed our plea as he has blessed no other people since the days of inspiration. In 1798, one hundred years ago, we had no existence as a distinct religious body. And in 1820, seventy-eight years ago, we only had a few members and eight small congregations. But in 1898, we have 10,063 churches, and a membership of more than a million souls, and still our growth is the wonder of the religious world. Let us but continue faithful in our mission, and still greater blessings will be ours. But if we prove untrue to it, enlargement and deliverance will come from some other source, and this great gate of opportunity will forever have closed in our faces.

V.

ESTHER PLEADING FOR HER PEOPLE.

Esther 5:1-14.

THE three anxious days of fasting have passed, during which Esther must have realized that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." For seventy-two long hours, like Jacob, she has wrestled with God, determined never to let him go till the blessing came. Poor woman! How her struggle should arouse our sympathy. We pity the beggar in his rags, and he may, or may not, appreciate it. But it seldom occurs to us that there may be greater sadness in the palace, and that the heart may beat in anguish beneath royal robes.

But Esther was not only devotional, she was practical. She leaned upon God as if everything depended on Him, and she labored as if it all rested on her shoulders. She knew there were some things which none but God could do, and there were others within her power, and these she must do. And one of these was that she must again captivate the king. She did it

once; why not again? And she would try. So she robes herself beautifully as possible, and puts on her "royal apparel." If there is one robe more popular with the king than all others it will be worn now; and if she has jewels specially pleasing to him, they will be taken from the casket. No stone must be left unturned; his heart must be won.

And when thus attired she goes into the presence of Xerxes. As she nears the palace the royal guard, ever on the watch for the safety of their master, is about to command her to "Halt!" when lo! they discover it is their queen. Reverently they part ranks for her to pass. She is now at the door. She pauses that her faithful maids may give the last deft touch to her beautiful apparel. And when this is done she dismisses them, for they can do no more for her, and she will not endanger their lives by having them go farther. Again she moves forward, and again she pauses. Another step, and she will be in the presence of the king. This pause is for one final appeal to heaven for help. Clasping her jeweled hands, and raising her earnest eyes, she pours out the contents of her bleeding heart to God: *O God—Israel's God—*

WHAT WILT THOU, QUEEN ESTHER?

hear and help thy feeble but trusting child in this hour of sorest need! The petition is heard, and quicker than an electric flash the answer came. The trembling lips cease to quiver, the wavering steps grow steady, the heart is no longer in the throat, and she moves forward in the calm confidence that all is well. In a moment she stands before the king. He looks up

in astonishment. What does this mean? Where are the guards at the palace door? Why have they let any one enter? Then he looks into the face of Queen Esther. He never before saw such beauty. Forgetting his guards, and all things else, he falls a helpless prisoner before her irresistible charms. He extends to her the golden scepter, she touches it, and then kneels at his feet like an angel from the skies. In rapture he asks, "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom."

Good-bye, Haman. You are gone. I know they say the laws of the Medes and Persians change not, but still you are gone, for in the presence of such beauty as this there is no law except beauty's wish.

Esther answered: "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him." She knew that the surest way to a man's heart was through his stomach, and she would feast him. She also knew that it took time to accomplish great things, and she would wait. Over against the proverb, "Postpone not until to-morrow that which should be done to-day,"

she would place another equally true, "Attempt not to-day that which should be delayed till to-morrow." And if procrastination is the thief of time, precipitation is its assassin. Napoleon was urged to declare himself emperor. He replied, "The fruit is not ripe." So thought wise Esther, and she would play for time.

The king was pleased, and commanded Haman to make haste, and the morrow found them at the feast. Still under the spell of her charms, he repeats his question and promise. Esther answers, "My petition and my request is," but at that instant she saw something in the king's face that made her feel that all things were not yet ready, or she felt within herself the need of further preparation, and she changes her mind, and concludes her answer by asking them to come to another feast to-morrow. And here the man must be blind indeed who cannot see the finger of God. During that night the king, who probably had eaten too freely at the feast, could not sleep, and calling an attendant to read to him, he learned that his life had been saved by Mordecai, and that for this invaluable service he had not been rewarded.

Haman is now happy. His cup of joy "run-

neth over." "He went forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart." He has long been in favor with the king, and at last he has won a warm place in the heart of the queen. His path is strewn with roses, and the last pebble in the way is removed. Every cloud has disappeared, and the sky is bright. What a contradiction is man! His heart, like Haman's, may be black as perdition with falsehood, treachery and murder, and yet his face may be wreathed in smiles, and the world thinks him happy.

In this delightful mood he starts for home. As he nears the king's gate all bow to do him reverence except Mordecai. This stings his proud heart to the core. The smile of joy gives place to a scowl of anger, and but for his dignity he would thrust a dagger into the heart of this defiant Jew. But remembering his dignity, and remembering that the 13th of Adar is coming on, when the stubborn Jew and all of his kind will be slain, he restrains himself. But still writhing under the insult, he reaches home, and calls for his wife and friends. He tells them of the glory of his riches—a mighty millionaire, no doubt; of his children—a richer heritage far; of his glory—the second place in

the greatest kingdom of the world, and his favor with the queen. "Yet," he continues, "all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Then Zeresh, his wife, with the approbation of his friends, begins to advise him. Listen to her heartless counsel: "Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet." And Haman endorsed the plan, and the gallows was made.

Strange combination! But extremes often meet. We can go so far east as to go west. And so here are combined joy and sorrow, life and death, the banquet and the gallows. So closely do joy and sorrow tread upon each other's heels, and tears and smiles are near neighbors.

But here we reluctantly drop the thread of this thrilling story that we may enrich ourselves with a few of its many lessons. And we learn first a lesson of self-restraint. When Mordecai refused to bow before Haman it so enraged him that but for his self-restraint he would either

have slain him himself, or had an attendant slay him. Many of us indulge our evil passions, and think to excuse ourselves by claiming that we could not control them. A man who ordinarily does not control his temper will have it in perfect discipline when in the presence of those on whom he is dependent, or whose esteem he desires to gain. Another, given to strong drink, will be careful not to indulge too freely when such indulgence would thwart some cherished plan, or rob him of a tempting prize. One addicted to profanity, when in the presence of a superior who detests that sin, is careful that no oath stains his lips. I once knew a saintly soul and a great preacher who was a slave to the tobacco habit. He indulged it until his friends became alarmed about his health, and begged him to give it up. He shared their anxiety, but told them the habit was so strong that he could not break it off. In a few years he discovered a small sore on his nose. He consulted a physician, who told him that it appeared to be cancerous, and was probably the result of excessive smoking, and advised him to quit the use of tobacco, and—he quit. With God's help we can, if we will, restrain every evil passion.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

We learn in the second place the curse of a bad wife. A good wife is heaven's best gift to man. She is his angel of mercy, his gem of all virtues, his casket of richest jewels, his friend that never fails. Her smile is his life, her voice his sweetest music, her kiss the guardian of his purity, her arms the harbor of his safety, her lips his wisest counselor, her bosom the softest pillow for his cares, and her prayers his strongest advocate at the throne of God. But a bad wife is a curse that no language can fitly describe. Listen at the counsel which this one did *not* give: She did not meet her troubled husband at the door, and, after saluting him with caresses, say: "Dear husband, I would not be worried over this little matter. Think of our blessings, and be happy. Behold our great wealth, and the honors which cluster about your name; and the favor of the crown, lifting you above all other princes, and of our precious children, the richest gift of all." But, like another Jezebel, she fans his anger into a more

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furious flame; like Lady Macbeth, she inspires him with the daring of a demon.

A third lesson tells us of the real character of worldly joy. When Haman left the feast that day his happiness knew no bounds. But how short-lived it was. How shallow the cup from which he drank, and how full of foam its draught. Before the setting of the sun all would be changed, so close did misery follow mirth. His end reminds us of the bullock, covered with garlands and saluted with music, on its way to be sacrificed; or of the fishes gliding merrily down the silvery Jordan to be swallowed up in the great Salt Sea of death. The joy which the world gives is too uncertain, too unsubstantial, and too fleeting, for a soul destined to live forever. Let us drink at that fountain which slakes the thirst for all time, and eat of that bread which never fails to satisfy, and our joy will know no end.

A fourth lesson, a most precious one, is gleaned from a contrast of intercessors. Queen Esther was never so beautiful as when kneeling before the king and pleading for her people. She pleaded for a nation, but Christ pleads for the world; she pleaded for the body, but Christ

pleads for the soul; she pleaded for time, but Christ for eternity; she pleaded for her frends, but Christ for his enemies. And the contrast is equally clear when looked at in its surroundings. She ventured into the presence of a haughty and often heartless monarch, we go to a God of love; she was not called, we are cordially and constantly invited; she went in against the law, we have precept and promise wooing us to enter; she had no friend at court on which to rely, and the chief favorite at the throne was the mortal foe of her name and race; we have an advocate with the Father in the person of his Son, our Elder Brother. Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find help in time of need.

A final lesson relates to true heroism. We are so accustomed to associate courage with physical strength that we are apt to forget that it is often a feminine virtue. Who can read without rapture the story of Deborah delivering Israel from ruin? or Joan of Arc, the brave girl on her white charger, who hurled back the invaders of France, and restored the crown to her king? or Grace Darling who, amid the

wild waves, risked her own life that she might save the lives of others? A woman, because of the delicacy of her nature, at first shrinks from the difficult and dangerous. But when once aroused she becomes the most heroic of beings.

Esther was no heartless beauty, intent on her own elevation and indifferent to the fate of others. If there is one thing more repellant than another it is a beautiful woman with a heart of stone, and a spirit steeped in selfishness. And if there is one thing more attractive than all others it is one whose lovely form and features are but the exquisite casket of a still more lovely soul. Such was Queen Esther. She looks the whole field over, and studies in detail its every point. Is it wise to undertake the reversal of an irreversible decree? Is it prudent to press unbidden into the presence of a Persian king? Heartless Haman may have turned his fickle love into hatred. If so, he will withhold the golden scepter, and death will be the penalty for daring to intrude into his sacred seclusion. And should the scepter be extended, and I live, can I present the claims of my countrymen with such eloquence as to command his attention? and with such pathos as to touch his

feelings? and with such power as to conquer his stubborn will? I know not; but this I do know: *I will try.* Perish I may; but if so, it will be sweet thus to die. My purpose is formed. My heart is fixed. The die is cast, and the Rubicon is crossed. I cast my lot with my doomed kindred. I will go in unto the king, and *if I perish, I perish.*

Brave, patriotic, sympathetic, trustful woman! The world has seldom seen your equal. Brave as a tigress, patriotic as Leonidas, sympathetic like the Savior, and trustful as a little child, she looks into the face of Jehovah, and puts her hand in his, and prays: *Lead me, Father, in the way I should go, and help me, whatever the cost, to save my people!*

Thermopylæ, Austerlitz, Waterloo, Bunker Hill and Gettysburg are synonyms for pure patriotism and dauntless courage. But here each comrade cheered the other, and helped him on to a glorious fame. But this heroine heard no strains of martial music, saw no banners waving in the breeze, and heard no shouts of victorious comrades; but all alone she stood like a wall of adamant for her people, the bravest of them all. And the only reason why Paul does

not enroll her with the heroes and heroines of faith must be that he did not have time. Surely her deed ranks her with Enoch, Abel and Noah. Surely her name is as bright as the names of Sarah, Rahab and Jephthah's daughter. Surely her choice was equal to that of Moses, and the offering of her own life was not less noble than Abraham's offering of his son.

VI.

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT.

Esther 6: 1-14.

HAMAN'S carpenters had to work all night that the gallows might be ready for Mordecai on the morrow. There was no sleep for them. Neither could the king sleep. Perhaps he had been imprudent in his diet at Esther's rich feast. Though his downy bed was in a frame of "gold and silver," and resting on a "pavement of red, and blue, and white and black marble," he could not sleep. "Nature's sweet restorer" was gone, and even great King Xerxes could not induce her to return. His word was law in one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, and he commanded an army of millions, but the goddess, Sleep, coy and fickle as a heartless maiden, snapped her fingers in his face and refused to obey him. Like a shadow she fled away, and all the faster the more he followed. And as the long hours slowly drag their weary way, he calls for some one to read

to him from the "book of records," the history of his reign, and it is opened at the place which told that Mordecai thwarted the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh against the life of the king, and he inquires if this service had been rewarded with the "honor and dignity" it so richly deserved. And they told him it had not. Filled with gratitude, he determined that it should be rewarded at once. He did not wait, as men often do, till Mordecai was dead, and then rear a monument to his memory. Nations often allow their heroes to starve in the garret, and then, to still the pangs of conscience, they raise a tall shaft of marble to commemorate their virtues. "Give us more taffy while we live, and less epitaphy when we are dead." Even heathen Xerxes could teach us not to be so busy building the tombs of the prophets and garnishing the sepulchres of the righteous as to forget the presence of the living prophets, and make us blind to the worth of the righteous still on earth.

But just then—early in the morning—footsteps are heard in the hall, and the king inquires, "Who is in the court?" He seems anxious that there shall be no more delay in

rewarding Mordecai. And it must have been a peculiar joy to learn that Haman, his chief officer, the very man he needed most, was at

READING TO THE SLEEPLESS KING.

hand. "Come in, Haman, I am glad to see you. An important matter has come to my notice, and I want your help in dealing with it. What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?"

Haman, sure that he is the man alluded to, is filled with pride and vanity. But he retains his wits, and promptly answers: "Let the royal apparel be brought which the king weareth, and the horse which the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him: Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor."

This is no ordinary request. Indeed it is most remarkable. For an ordinary man to wear the robes of a king was a capital offense, though sometimes it was forgiven. Arrian says: "Alexander was sailing on the Euphrates, and his turban happened to fall among the reeds, when one of his watermen immediately jumped in and swam to it. But as he could not bring it back in his hand without wetting it, he put it upon his head, and so returned with it. Whereupon Alexander gave him a talent of silver for this expression of his zeal

to serve him, but, at the same time, ordered his head to be struck off for presuming to put on the royal diadem." But this egotistic man fears nothing of this kind. It would be like him to think that Xerxes would almost feel honored to have his kingly robes worn by the great Haman.

And it may be that he was aspiring to the Persian crown, and would turn this honor into an attack on his master's throne. About all he lacks of being a king is decoration in the badges of royalty. In that country at that time there were often but a few steps between the dungeon and the throne, and frequently the transfer of the crown from the prince to a noble was the work of only a few hours. And it is not at all improbable that the presumption and conceit of this vainglorious man had so far misconstrued the favors which Esther was showering on him, as to convince him that the queen herself would not regret the change. Self-admirers are generally self-deceivers. If this surmise is just, it throws much light on Haman's answer.

But whatever his motives, it is impossible to conceive the horror and amazement he must

have felt at the king's reply. If an earthquake had suddenly shaken the palace he would not have been more dismayed than when he heard the clear tones of that voice which few ever heard without trembling, as they sounded the death knell of his proud ambition. "Make haste," said the king, "and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai, the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all thou hast spoken." It was awful. It was agony. Every sentence left a poisoned arrow rankling in his heart. Did ever thunderbolt fall more suddenly from the skies? Could he believe his own ears? Was it not a hideous nightmare which for the moment had seized him? How galling to have the honor intended for himself bestowed upon another, and that other a Jew. And not only a Jew, but the one particular Jew which he hated above all others, whose death he had plotted, and for whose immediate execution he had hurriedly come to the palace so early that morning.

But he must obey. No other alternative is possible. Xerxes has spoken, and to disobey is death. So with the best grace he can command, he carries out his orders. He finds Mor-

decai at the gate, and makes known his mission. As he approaches him, Mordecai again refused to bow, but he takes no notice of it. Weightier matters now claim his attention. He robes him in royal attire, and mounts him on the king's horse. These robes were worth 12,000 talents. They were one blaze of jewels, literally dazzling the eyes. A threefold tiara on the head, was covered with rubies, diamonds, pearls and emeralds, so arranged as to reflect in splendor all their colors. The robe itself was a golden cloth, adorned with precious stones and pearls. Suspended from the neck was a string of pearls, the largest in the world. The armlets and girdles blazed in the sun like fire. And upon the head was the crown royal, the richest on the globe. Thus gorgeously robed, and mounted upon this splendid Persian steed, Mordecai passes through the city, the observed, admired, and envied of all, while poor Haman, his lackey, runs before and announces his coming. How downcast he must have looked, and how he must have hung his head and refused to look into the face of the people, and how every word of the proclamation must have burned his throat.

His punishment was great, but it was not greater than he intended to inflict on another. His cup was filled with gall, but it was filled by

MORDECAI REWARDED.

himself. His bed was hard, but he had made it. The pit was deep, but he had dug it.

The great procession over, Mordecai returns to his humble post of duty, and Haman hastens to his home, and pours out his grief before Zeresh and his friends. Where else could he

go? A good wife is a man's fortress in the hour of adversity. Like the ivy, she clings the closer the greater the ruin, and becomes not only a support, but an ornament to the ruin.

They listen to his sad story, and then like the comforters of Job, they proceed to add anguish to his already heavy burden: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." Had he been a Persian, or an Egyptian, it might not be so bad. But the Jews are God's peculiar people, and he will see that they prevail. He preserved Daniel in the lions' den, and the Hebrew children in the furnace of fire, and he will not fail Mordecai.

And while they were talking, the messengers came and hurried Haman off to Esther's second feast.

Now turning from this most dramatic story, again let us impress a few of its practical lessons. We learn first of the providence of God. I know not how it is with others, but as for me, there is no solution of this strange story except as it is unlocked by the key called Providence.

Note how a number of little things are fitted together to produce this result. 1. The king could not sleep. Ordinarily this would not be a matter of much moment, but in this case it is of tremendous importance. If he had slept, there would have been no reading, and if no reading he would not have been reminded of the unrewarded deed of Mordecai in saving his life, and not knowing this, he would, in all probability, have granted Haman's request, and sent him to the gallows. 2. He called for a reader instead of a musician. Persian kings were proverbially fond of music, and always kept the best musicians about the palace. Suppose Xerxes had called these instead of a reader, the result would have been entirely changed. 3. And suppose when the reader came, he had chosen something else from which to read. 4. Or, having chosen the "records," suppose he had selected a different part of them for his reading. 5. And suppose Haman had come an hour or so later. In that case he would not have found the king with this matter pressing on his mind, and he could have gotten in his petition (for he would not likely have called Mordecai's name), and he would have been

hung. In all this there is no miracle. Every actor is left to his own part, and does the thing he chooses to do. And yet here are five little things, either of which being different, the story of Esther, as we have it to-day, would never have been. And this is not exceptional. The story of Joseph, and that of the early life of Moses are of a similar kind. Modern history also is full of the same. The way over which Providence leads is often wild and rough, but if we will follow faithfully the leading, the end will be safety and peace. But we must follow, and not force our leader. The pure white lilies of God's love will unfold in due time. But we must not, like impatient Jacob, tear the slowly opening leaves apart. If we do, his wretchedness and wanderings will be repeated in our lives. Let us trust, for

> "Behind the dim unknown
> Standeth God within the shadow,
> Keeping watch above his own."

He that feedeth the raven, and careth for the sparrow, will not forget His children; He that numbereth the hairs of our head will see that we are not neglected.

Another lesson is gleaned from the character

of Mordecai. Few men can bear honors in a becoming manner, even when they come gradually; how much harder when they come suddenly. What fatal effects we often see on head and heart of those who have risen from obscurity and poverty to rank and wealth. Good men are not always proof against the intoxicating influence of such transitions. The vessel needs to be well ballasted when its sails are suddenly filled with a strong gust of wind. But Mordecai does not lose his head. The king's robes and crown, the wild shouts of the populace, with all the gorgeous pageantry of the hour, do not dethrone his reason. He knows it to be a vain and temporary show, which he endured, rather than enjoyed. And when it was over, he returned to his modest post of duty, robed in humility,—a garment richer than Xerxes ever knew. He did not remain to receive the congratulations of his friends, or to drink the incense offered by the crowds. Neither did he go to his home and tell his friends of his honors. Nor did he seek an audidience with the king and bring an accusation against his old enemy and the enemy of his people. But he returned to his lowly place and

took up again the duties of the post. And as we find ten Christians who can bear well the trials of adversity, where we find one to bear the sharper trial of prosperity, let all study the character of Mordecai.

The reading of this old Persian record suggests another lesson. For six years the conspiracy against the king's life, thwarted by Mordecai, had been recorded in the book of Chronicles, but not a word of recognition, or an act of appreciation had come to him. Under such circumstances most of us would have found some way to refresh the king's memory. But he was silent. He was a man of faith. The seed had been sown, and he would wait for it to grow and ripen. He remembered that the butler forgot Joseph, but God did not. And it must have remained forever locked up in those old musty records, but for the interposition of God. And so will it be in all the records of life. In due time all will be brought to light. So small a thing as the giving of a cup of cold water will not be forgotten.

But while this thought is full of comfort to the saint, it is sad to the sinner. A record is being kept of his deeds also, and that record

must come to the light. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid, that shall not be known." May the blood of Christ cleanse every record before we go to the judgment bar.

VII.

HAMAN HANGED.

Esther 7: 1-10.

THE messengers had hastened Haman to the feast. He was in no condition to enjoy it; but that made no difference. He had to go, and had to go in a hurry. No time was to be lost. The day of doom had arrived, and he was ushered in.

Let us pause for a moment and note the three prominent characters at this feast. There sits Haman, who from some unknown cause had reached the lofty pinnacle of second place in the world's greatest kingdom. He must have possessed great power, or this could not have been done. He is wicked, wise, and unscrupulous. Questions of right and wrong have no influence with him. His nature is elastic. He is ready to applaud or censure; to employ truth or falsehood; to be kind or cruel; to be frank or to practice dissimulation,—anything to further his own schemes. Like a cat, drop him as you will, he will light on his feet.

Look next at Xerxes. He has more power than any other living mortal. But he is vacillating, impulsive, and heartless, and yet not wholly lost to questions of righteousness, or he would not have bothered himself about rewarding Mordecai. He is happy this morning. His curiosity has been wrought up to the highest tension, for he is yet in ignorance as to the request to be made by the queen, and has never dreamed of the startling revelation so soon to burst upon his vision.

But the central figure is beautiful Esther. She is a perfect dream of beauty. Her robes are fascinating beyond description; her figure is as perfect as fancy could paint; her countenance, though marked with grief, is all the more lovely because of her sorrow; her heart aches and throbs with fear and hope; her soul trembles at its great responsibility; her lips quiver at the thought of pronouncing the doom of Haman; and her eye scans the face of the king that she may read its every indication.

For once the king cannot be accused of vacillation. At last he seems to be fixed. For the third time he asks the queen?: "What is thy petition?" He seems more anxious to know

than she is to tell; more anxious to give than she is to receive.

Esther recognizes her opportunity. And now that it has come, she meets it in calmness and confidence. The woman who could defy the laws of the Medes and Persians will not fail now. She has fully regained her place in the king's affections, and it is time to speak. The iron is hot, and she will strike; the fruit is ripe, and she will pluck it. Her lips at last are unsealed, and she speaks as only a wise woman, aflame with zeal, and burdened with a crushing responsibility, can speak. In two burning sentences she tells the whole story: Notice, 1. Her happy introduction: "If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king." Could anything be more graceful, modest, and artistic? It ranks with Paul before Agrippa. She does not forget the courtesy due a king. And if anything was yet needed to win Xerxes, surely this speech from this heart and these lips would be sufficient. 2. She pleads for her life: "Let my life be given me at my petition." She knew herself to be the idol of his heart, and if anything would arouse him it would be her peril, and she thrusts herself into the

breach. 3. She pleads for her people: "And my people at my request." Probably she might have secured her own salvation regardless of their fate, but her noble soul scorned such a thought. *If I live, let them live; if they die, let me die.* 4. She enlightens the king: "For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." She alludes here in the most delicate way to the 10,000 talents of silver promised by Haman for the privilege of their destruction. And the words "to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish" are exact quotations from the awful decree published by Haman, which had burned themselves into her brain. 5. She apologizes: "But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not avail the king's damage." She means if life had been prolonged, even though in slavery, she would not have troubled him with their misfortunes, but would have waited for deliverance at the hands of Providence. And she adroitly appeals to the king's avarice by telling him that in the destruction of such a race,—industrious, law-abiding, and prosperous,—his "damage" would be great. In the

massacre of St. Bartholomew and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the Huguenots were destroyed or banished from France, and with them the mechanical and manufacturing enterprise of the nation, a loss from which the nation has never recovered. "All such Haman-like deeds are not merely crimes, but blunders; infringements of the laws of political economy as well as violations of the sacred principles of liberty, and the damage resulting from them cannot be countervailed."

The king in a wild rage asks, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Show me the wicked wretch, and I will see that full justice is meted out to him without delay.

The queen is no longer a suppliant, but a fierce prosecutrix. The hands which had been clasped in prayer are lifted in anger, and the eyes which had been moistened with tears now flash with indignation, as they pierce like burning stars the trembling demon who polluted the royal palace. Rising from her couch, she throws her index finger in the face of Haman and says, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman."

The revelation to Xerxes was like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky. His Prime Minister of State, whom he had raised to position and power, had abused his position and corrupted his power. The man to whom he had trusted his signet ring had betrayed his trust. And as a result of this treachery his lovely queen is standing on the brink of a volcano, and a whole nation of peaceable and useful citizens has been doomed to death. His wrath is fierce and furious, but still under control. He is too angry to trust his lips, and goes into the "palace garden" for composure. This speaks well for the king, but it bodes no good for Haman. He may well fear the man who controls his anger

ESTHER'S BANQUET.

till his purpose is formed; who refuses to act till his judgment and not his passions directs.

Haman realized that there was no hope for him in the king. His only resort is to plead with the queen. His case is desperate; time is precious; not a moment can be spared. The cringing coward begs for his life. A virtuous soul might have been brave and calm, but his was full of vice. In a frenzy of despair he throws himself on the couch where the queen was relining, and piteously pleads: O let me live! let me live! Strip me of every honor and banish me to some lonely isle, but let me live! I will never speak to you again, I will never pollute the palace more, but let me live! Poor dog, I know I deserve to die, but cast me far from thy presence, and let me live!

The sweet air of the palace garden, laden with the odor of flowers, did not allay the king's anger. The soft music that floated on the breezes did not drive away the evil spirit. The whirlwind of passion raging in his breast increases with reflection. The atrocity of the crime grows on him, and sets his soul on fire. Angry he went forth, and angry he returned.

And as he enters he finds Haman at the feet

of the queen, urging, with the desperation of despair, his plea for life, and this adds to his anger. Can it be that he hopes by the agony

HAMAN CONDEMNED.

of his terror to take advantage of her womanly nature, and force her to grant his plea? The thought feeds his rage. His courtiers read his face, and they seize Haman, cover his face, and

rush him out of the palace. And just then the quick-witted Harbonah suggests the fitness of hanging him on his own gallows; the suggestian is adopted by Xerxes, and in a few moments he is dangling seventy-five feet in mid-air, between earth and heaven, as if unfit for either. "Then was the king's wrath pacified."

Turning now from this dark history, let us spend a few moments in gathering up its lessons. We learn first how to accuse an enemy. Do it to his face, and thus give him an opportunity to defend himself. There is no evidence that Esther had said a word against Haman until she met him in the banquet hall. She would not poison the mind of the king against him. If she could not win her case on its merits she would not win it at all. Like Paul in his accusation of Peter, she looks him in the eye that he may, if he can, protect himself. Many of us should heed this lesson, and never say in one's absence what we would hesitate to say in his presence. When a newspaper reporter asked Captain Sigsbee, of the ill-fated battle-ship Maine, "What do you think caused the explosion?" the prudent soldier replied,

"You will have to excuse me from answering that. In such cases it is best not to think; it is best to know. That requires investigation and time." That was a wise answer, and it shows that Sigsbee is not only a soldier, but a philosopher.

We learn in the second place how rapidly the wheel of fortune revolves. One day Haman is second in power in the greatest kingdom of the earth, and the next he is a lackey. So we rise and so we fall. Of those prominent in political life twenty years ago, how few are conspicuous to-day! Of those who then were rich, how few have not met reverses! And of those who then were poor, how many now own the bonds of the nation, and have swinging from their girdles the keys to its vaults! Of all the fickle things under the sun, Fortune is the most fickle. She is more so than the wind. Between the rising and setting of every sun she changes her mind. In the morning she smiles, in the evening she frowns. With one breath she shouts your praise, with the next she blights your hopes. She cheers when you go up, she mocks when you come down. Oh, let us not worship at the shrine of a goddess so fickle and so false. Let

us anchor our souls in God. Then, come sorrow or gladness, success or failure, riches or poverty, honor or shame, health or sickness, life or death, time or eternity, all is ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

We learn in the third place that retribution is a law of the universe. Not that we are so to interpret every calamity. Some are prone to do this. Let a terrible accident befall a Sunday railroad train, and they are ready to pronounce it a righteous retribution for violating the holy day. They forget that on that train there may be a consignment of bread for the starving, clothes for the freezing, and a mother hastening to the bedside of a dying child. They also forget that many such accidents happen on other days of the week. If a theater, or some other building, the use of which is not generally approved by their class, is burned, and many lives are lost, they pronounce it another case of retribution. They forget that other buildings—hospitals for the sick, and churches, even, often meet a similar fate.

But in avoiding Scylla let us not wreck on Charybdis. In refusing to believe that every

calamity is a providence of God, let us not swing to the other extreme and deny retributive providence altogether, for both the Bible and history are filled with its proofs. Haman hangs on the gallows which he built for Mordecai. Pharaoh drowns the male children of the Hebrew in the Nile, and he is drowned in the sea. Judas betrays Christ with a kiss, and he himself is soon a suicide. Pilate, who washes his hands of His blood, but permits Him to die on the cross, is destined for a similar fate. Robespierre, who sent so many to the guillotine, had his own head chopped off by that horrid instrument. Lord Jeffries, who, while on the bench, was as cruel as a wild beast, and filled London Tower with the innocent and the good, finds his way to the same prison, where the ghosts of his own victims haunted him till he cried to his attendants: "Keep them off, gentlemen! for God's sake keep them off!"

The evil we practice on others will recoil on our own pates. Our chickens will come home to roost. Our wrong deeds, like a boomerang, will return and strike us in the face. "Opportunities fly in a straight line, and just touch us as they pass from eternity to eternity, but the

wrongs we do others fly in a circle, and however the circle may widen out, they are sure to come back to the point from which they started." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

And, finally, we learn by contrast something of the mercy of God. Haman pleaded in vain before Queen Esther. But no penitent soul ever thus pleads before our Father in heaven. He loves to be merciful. And when he sends Mercy to earth she drives winged steeds, and the chariot-wheels are glowing hot with speed. But when Wrath comes, she walks with tardy steps. God's rod of mercy is in his outstretched hand, but his sword of justice is in its scabbard.

But let no one presume upon this mercy. It will not override justice. It has a limit, and men have reached that limit and been lost. When rejected and spurned too long she becomes weary in her pleadings, and retires behind the sword of justice, red with unrepentant wrath. So was it with the flood; and so it was with Sodom and Gomorrah. She pleaded long and lovingly, but was finally forced to spread her wings and fly away, leaving them to their fate. The migratory bird, directed by its God-

given instinct to its distant home, is caught by the fowler and caged. It beats its wings frantically against the prison bars for awhile. But when the season in which birds migrate is past, the gate may be opened and it will not go. You may toss it into the air, but it is of no use; the instinct for flight is gone, and the bird has no desire to leave. When we are moved to accept Christ we should accept him then, lest the time come when the holy impulse is gone.

"There is a time, we know not when,
A place, we know not where,
Which marks the destiny of men
For glory or despair."

VIII.

THE NEW DECREE.

Esther 8:1–17.

THE changes taking place are so rapid and remarkable that we feel inclined to call them fiction rather than fact. Haman has been hanged and Mordecai exalted. Darkness has been turned to light, and despair to hope. The legions of evil are in flight, and those of good are flushed with victory. Justice in majesty is rising, and injustice is writhing beneath her heel.

But, after all, are such sudden changes as rare as they seem? Does not the empire, centuries in building, often perish in a day? Does not the fortune, a lifetime in accumulating, melt away in a few hours? Does not the reputation, the growth of long years, vanish like a morning mist?

The king gives to Esther the "house of Haman," excepting the royal wealth, the largest estate in the empire. What intolerable anguish to Haman had he known that all his money was

so soon to be in the hands of the hated Mordecai! Abject poverty all his life would have been preferable to this. But it is still true that we know not who will own our wealth to-morrow. As a rule, when it goes into the hands of our children it is a curse, and not a blessing, and its stay with them is brief. Before the grass grows upon our graves it is often in the coffers of those who hated us. And yet we pile it up and leave it, instead of using it for good while we live.

Mordecai is now fully known to Xerxes. The grateful queen has told him "what he was unto her." And how we wish we had heard her tell the story! She must have told of her ancestry far back in the past, as every Jew is proud to do unto this day. She must have told of their captivity and exile. She must have told of the death of her father and mother, and the kindness of Mordecai, as he pressed her to his bosom and said, "Don't cry, little Esther; my house shall be your home, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my own sweet daughter."

"And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mor-

decai," which makes him second in all his vast realm.

The queen is safe, and so is Mordecai, but not so the people, and the decree for their destruction must in some way be averted. How shall it be done? Personal intercession has succeeded thus far, and she will intercede again. "And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman, and his devise against the Jews." When pleading for her own life we hear nothing of kneeling and tears, but now she falls upon her knees and weeps, and no wonder the king cannot resist the appeal; and again holds out to her the "golden scepter." She clasps it, and, rising, continues her plea: "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman, for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

He tells her that he cannot reverse the decree, for the laws of his kingdom change not, but that he will give to her and Mordecai unlimited

power, that they may devise any plan they choose to meet the impending crisis. Poor weakling! How his noble queen must at heart have despised him. Unlike the lion, he does not leap directly on his foe, but, fox-like, resorts to trickery. He does not manfully confess his mistake, but twists and shuffles and tries to evade responsibility. Why did he not say, "Dear queen, I have been imposed upon, and led to the verge of a great crime; but now that I see the situation, I must in some way reverse the decree?" Then call a council, confess his error, and declare that henceforth the laws of the Medes and Persians might be altered. But such a course required true courage, a virtue he never had, hence he could not pursue it. Therefore, rather than make any confession which might reflect on his claims to infallibility (for Persian kings claimed to be gods), he would take the risk of plunging the whole empire into civil war.

Absurd as is the claim of infallibility, it still lives and thrives, even in our midst. On July 18, 1870, the Vatican Council declared: "When the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra* (by authority) he possesses infallibility." And

Earle's Manual of the Popes says: "When he speaks from the chair of St. Peter his voice is as authoritative as that which pronounced the law from Sinai, or which delivered the Sermon on the Mount." Gladstone, the world's greatest statesman, puts the whole story in a nutshell in these striking words: "This dogma of infallibility exempts the Bishop of Rome from error, and resolves the church into the Pope, and substitutes for the worship of Christ a man-God in Rome for the God-man in heaven."

Mordecai, the new prime minister, calls a council, and a decree is issued which gives the Jews the right of self-defense. This was perhaps the best way out of the difficulty, and so far as it relates to self-defense it was right. But we regret that women and children were involved, and that they were allowed to take the spoils for a prey. But the sequel shows—all honor to the Jews—that this clause was not acted upon. But we must not look for the morality of the nineteenth century in the fifth century before the coming of Christ.

The "posts," mounted on swiftest steeds, soon reach the most distant provinces, and the new decree is read in every home, and the hearts

of the people leap for joy. The tidings came like cold water to a thirsty soul. All over the empire the Jew would wipe the tears from his eyes, and cast aside his sackcloth, as he saw in this new message that God had not forgotten his covenant, and was not unmindful of his chosen people. And from hill and plain, from mountain and valley, from village and city, from sea and rivers, everywhere the glad notes of joy would fill and thrill the heart.

And as Mordecai went out among the people, robed in royal apparel, and with a great crown of gold, they rejoiced, and many of them became proselytes to the Jewish religion.

Here for the present we drop the thread of our story that we may gather a few of its lessons. We learn first as to the motives which should move us to accept Christianity. When the Persians saw that the queen and prime minister were Jews, many of them "became Jews." The surface inference is that their motive was bad, and in many cases it doubtless was, but not in all. At least two strong reasons can be given for this sudden growth of Judaism. 1. Many might have been converted by the interposition

of Providence in behalf of the Jews. 2. Others might have been led by the excitement of the hour to investigate the claims of this religion, and their conversion was the result of the investigation. But in this day, as well as in that, when the church is prosperous many will fly to her fold who would never think of doing it but for her prosperity. Many ascertain which is the fashionable church, and then join it. Others are prompted by business considerations. And others still that their matrimonial alliances may be improved. All such motives are bad. We should act from conviction. Whether the church is on the wave of prosperity or in the trough of adversity; whether the rulers be our friends or foes, should cut no figure with us. Let us imitate Moses, who, from conviction, turned away from the palace of Pharaoh, with all its ease, honors, wealth, and prospects, and was lifted by Jehovah to the highest pinnacle of any Old Testament saint; and Paul, who, from the same cause, left the popular church, and cast his lot with the despised few, and yet God saw to it that he gained infinitely more than he lost.

We learn secondly what is the true law of

promotion. Mordecai shows himself wise and faithful in a low sphere, and is raised to a higher one. This just law, with few exceptions, reigns among men in all spheres to-day. The faithful and efficient subordinate in the shop, in the store, in the bank,—everywhere, is the man for promotion. And woe to the man who seeks to rise by trickery. The deception is sure to be found out, and a crash must follow. The same is true in the kingdom of God. The Master at the judgment day will say to those who have been faithful in humble spheres: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

We learn in the third place the value of good officials. When Haman was in power the city was "perplexed," but when Mordecai succeeded him it "rejoiced and was glad." And the happiness of every government is largely dependent on the character of its rulers. Few calamities are worse than to have bad men in office. A man morally rotten is no more fit to pilot the ship of state than is a drunken pilot to direct a ship across the Atlantic. Such a man is not

more fit for office than is a piece of rotten wood for an axle. Boss Tweed, about twenty years ago, led a band of robbers, who corrupted the halls of legislation and poisoned the fountains of justice in the courts of law. And the same thing on a smaller scale has been done in a thousand other places. But both the cause and remedy for this great evil are in the ballot-box. Let us vote as we pray, and all will be well.

We learn in the fourth place a lesson concerning the irreversible. The claim that the laws of the Medes and Persians were irreversible was the quintessence of folly. But there is much connected with every human life which has this element in it. A dude in a railroad station was scratching on a mirror with his diamond ring. A newsboy said, "Don't write there." "Why?" answered the dude. "Because it can't be rubbed out," replied the boy. We can shake off the dewdrop from the rose, and though we pour the whole of the waters of the ocean on it, it can not be replaced. We can rub the soft down from the peach, but human skill cannot restore it. We can't recall the bullet as it flies from the gun, or the wicked word as it speeds from the lips. We can't prevent the harvest that

comes from the "sowing of wild oats." Gough, the great temperance apostle, used to pause in the midst of his speeches, and weep as if his heart would break, as he remembered an unkindness to his mother. Lifting his hand toward the heavens, he would say, "I would give this good right hand of mine if I could only bring back my dead mother, and undo the wrong I did her." And then he would shout as if he wanted all the world to hear, "Young man, keep your record clean!"

Our last lesson is the joy of deliverance. As the hurrying messengers carried the good news of the new decree throughout the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, "the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day." They felt like the condemned man nearing the gallows, when a pardon comes; or like the sick man, not far from the grave, when told that he will live. The night had been dark and stormy, and every star was hid. The doleful wind, as it swept over hill and dale, seemed to sing their funeral dirge. But at last the sun is risen, and the hilltops are gilded in glory, and the valleys are flooded with cheerful light. Even so do we rejoice when God in Christ saves us from sin.

We are in a dark dungeon, and some one opens the door; we are wandering in a vast wilderness, lost, and some one guides us home; we are crushed under a heavy burden, and some one lifts it from our shoulders; we are drifting on the wild waves, and the lifeboat comes; we have fought and been defeated, when re-enforcements arrive, and bring with them victory; we are starving, and some one gives us bread; we are dying of thirst, and some one gives us water; we are naked and cold, and some one clothes us; we are homeless and hopeless, and some one points to our Father's house in heaven. "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

IX.

VICTORY AND ITS MEMORIAL.

Esther 9:1—10:3.

THE Jews had nine months in which to prepare, and when the conflict came they were ready. Like all wars of races, it was a bloody one. At sunset on the 13th of Adar 75,000 Persians had been slain. The Jewish loss is not given, but in a battle so general and fierce it must have been large, so that the total losses could not have been less than 100,000. When the warlike character of the people and the time are remembered, and when it is known that the population of the empire was 100,000,000, these figures are not unreasonable. However, it is but just to state that the Septuagint gives the figures at 15,000. Such a mistake, owing to the peculiar way of expressing numerals in the Hebrew, might easily occur.

In this conflict there are two facts concerning the Jews that must not be forgotten: 1. They acted in self-defense. This is one of nature's universal laws. God has not made a creature

without means of self-protection. There is no evidence that the Jews molested any one except when assailed, and all deaths under these circumstances would be "justifiable homicide." 2. They were merciful. Their instructions permitted the destruction of "both little ones and women, and to take the spoil for a prey." But there is no mention of injury to women and children, and it is declared that they did not take the spoil for a prey. The spirit of vengeance had no place in their hearts, and if not assailed by others, not a life would have been lost.

In the case of Esther all is not so clear. At the close of the day the king reported to her that in Shushan alone 500 had been slain, and intimated that, according to these figures, the slaughter in the entire kingdom must have been terrible; but still he adds: "What is thy request further? and it shall be done?" And Esther answered, "If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews in Shushan to do to-morrow according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." Her request was granted, and 300 more were slain, and the ten bodies asked for were hoisted as a

ghastly warning to all enemies of the Jews. Some claim this to be vindictive, and, if so, it is no more to be defended than the conduct of Haman. But before admitting the claim let us carefully study the case. 1. She only asks for a continuation of the right of self-defense. The city had a population of half a million, and it was not to be supposed that it would be intimidated by a loss of only 500 men. The sequel proved this supposition true, for on the next day the loss was 300 more. 2. Her request that Haman's sons be suspended from the gallows has the appearance of great cruelty, but is susceptible of a very different interpretation. As a queen it was her duty, as a matter of public safety, to restrain these persecutors of the Jews as soon as possible; and it may be that a spectacle of this nature was the most effective method of striking terror into their souls. A Christian soldier who was never accused of cruelty, and whose fame is world-wide, both for courage and kindness, at one time had the safety of his army threatened by straggling. He ordered three of these stragglers shot, and their bodies, bearing placards showing why they were shot, to be exhibited on the roadside,

that all might be warned. The case was a desperate one, and it demanded a desperate remedy. But it had the desired effect. Discipline was restored and the army was saved. And so it may have been with Esther. This awful object-lesson may have been the means of restraining the enemies of her people, and saving multitudes of human lives. 3. But whatever may have been her motive, let it not be forgotten that she lived 2,500 years before Christ, and therefore her deed must be judged, not by the code of the Sermon on the Mount, but by the standard of her day and generation. The half-ripe fruit of June must not be judged by the standard applied to that of the full summer and autumn. The gray streaks of the opening day must not be compared with the noonday splendor of the sun.

The gratitude for this wonderful deliverance found expression in Esther's feast, on the 13th of Adar, which is observed until this day. Vandyke thus describes it: "As soon as the stars begin to appear they light candles in token of rejoicing, and the people—men, women and children—assemble in the synagogue. A brief prayer is offered. Thanksgivings are rendered.

Thereupon the reader translates the entire book of Esther, and makes comments thereon. Every time the name of Haman is pronounced the audience stamp their feet and cry out, 'Let the memory of the wicked perish!' Curses are heaped upon the perished races of the Amalekites. The children, with mallets provided for the occasion, and on which is inscribed the name of Haman, strike on the walls and seats. The names of the ten sons of Haman are uttered as one word, to signify that all were hanged at once. When the reading is completed the audience shouts, 'Cursed be Haman; blessed be Mordecai. Cursed be Zeresh; blessed be Esther. Cursed be all idolaters; blessed be all Israelites. Blessed be Horbonah who hanged Haman.' The religious services over, they give themselves to music, games and dancing, and presents are exchanged by friends, and gifts are sent to the poor."

Our study of this fascinating story is now ended, and we pause for the last time to garner some of its lessons. We learn anew that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." The day for the death of the Jews was fixed, and the

strongest government in the world had sanctioned the deed. But when it came, it proved to be not a day of death, but a day of deliverance. Their enemies thought the sun on that day would gild a glorious triumph, but it lighted a funeral march. Joseph was lifted from a pit to a palace, from a prison to a throne. Israel was hemmed in by mountains on the right and left, by their enemies in the rear, and by the sea in front, apparently with no possible way of escape, but God parted the waves, and led them safely to the shore. The disciples were in the midst of Galilee, hopelessly fighting a stormy sea, but Christ came in time to save. Peter was in prison, chained and helpless, Herod intending the next day to bring him to the block, but the angel came in time to snap his chains asunder, and open the bolted gates, and lead him out into liberty and life. Let us, therefore, not despair, but trust, for God is a present help in time of trouble.

We learn again that there are two great elements in the matter of salvation. People, like pendulums, swing to extremes. Some teach that salvation is altogether of God. Man is dead in sins—as dead spiritually as Lazarus was

physically—hence, nothing less than a miracle can bring him to life. Others go to the other extreme, and teach that it is altogether of man; God having done his part, retires from the scene, leaving us to live or die, as we may choose. A man is drowning, and we shout to him to save himself, but as we call we throw him a rope. He seizes the rope, and we pull him to the shore. Here both extremes meet, and we have the golden mean. The help of others supplies the rope, and the help of self appropriates it, and the lost is saved. To call on him to save himself without thowing the rope is solemn mockery and withering irony; and to refuse to seize the rope would be blind and fatal fanaticism. So God does for man what he cannot do for himself, but requires of him to do everything in his power. The wheels of Providence these Jews could not turn, and God saw to their revolutions. But they could stand together as one man and defend themselves, and this they were required to do, and thus were they saved.

Once more we learn the value of monumental testimony. It is inconceivable that Esther's feast could have originated at a time and place

where the people were familiar with all the facts if it was not founded on fact. Our Fourth of July could not be changed to the fourth of June, simply because it would not be true to the facts in the case. The Lord's Supper and the Lord's day are memorials of the death and resurrection of our Lord. Like Esther's feast, and the Fourth of July, they had their origin at a time and place when all were familiar with the facts; and yet they live and flourish all over the world to-day as indisputable evidence of the truthfulness of our holy religion. If the first two memorials would be accepted in any court as reliable testimony, how can the other two be rejected? The truth in each case is the same, and in both it is irresistible and incontrovertible.

But the time has come when we must close. We must bid farewell to this fascinating book. We have studied it chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and often word by word, and have found it as fresh as if written only yesterday. We have found it as full of practical lessons as a garden is of fruits. But its supreme lesson, looming high above all others like the sun above the stars, we have seen on every page.

It is this: God rules among men, and rewards the righteous. True, his name is not here, but his hand is never absent. When Lincoln was killed, a wild mob, ready for any deed of daring or destruction, assembled in New York. Trembling with rage and breathing out curses, it surged to and fro in the great metropolis, and people feared the result. Garfield, the Christian statesman, mounted a balcony, waved his hand, caught their ears, and shouted, "God reigns and the government lives!" Their passions subsided and the mob dispersed. And now that the curtain has fallen for the last time on this thrilling drama, we feel like saying, God reigns and the righteous are safe! A delayed train was flying with the speed of the wind. The passengers, except one little child, were frightened. Some one asked, "Little one, why are you not afraid?" The quick answer came, "Because papa is on the engine." Even so, our Father is at the helm, and his children should not fear.

We must say farewell to Vashti. We saw her only for a moment, but that vision will never fade from memory. Beautiful, pure and heroic, she stands at the parting of the ways, and at

the cost of fame, wealth and crown, she follows the instincts of her womanly nature and the promptings of conscience, and chooses what she believes to be right. But as she passes down from the throne, and out from the palace, and as she lays aside the crown and robes of royalty, rather than tarnish her name as a woman, she is a thousandfold more a queen than ever before. Angels bring her a crown from God, and robe her soul in the livery of heaven, and lift her to a throne higher than the earth ever knew. In our vision of her we see her standing between Moses and Paul, both of whom, for conscience' sake, left all that was dear to them, and gave their lives to God. Blessed trinity! It must ever remain one of the chief charms of heaven.

We must say farewell to Haman. We are sorry to have met him. We have been close to him, and feel that we know him well. We saw him rise from obscurity to great prominence and power. We saw a golden stream flow into his coffers until he became the Crœsus of his age. We saw difficulties vanish at his strong strokes like mists before the sun. We saw doors of opportunity for good open before his face, but

he would not enter. We saw his heart grow harder and colder day by day. We saw him abuse his position and corrupt his power. We saw him betray a sacred trust and doom a nation to death. We saw his plans miscarry, and we heard his groans from the valley of disappointment. We saw him cower and cringe and fall at the feet of the queen and beg for his life. And finally we saw him die on a gallows which he had raised for another, and swing into an eternity for which he was not prepared. Poor Haman! We have studied you closely and kindly, and alas! have failed to see a single thing in you which gives us pleasure to remember.

We must say farewell to Xerxes. He was the greatest king, as the world counts greatness, which men then knew. His domains were well nigh boundless, and his power few dared dispute. Though he had so much, he still wanted more. His ambition made him reckless, and his recklessness almost wrought his ruin. His Persian hordes were no match for Grecian valor. And when they met in mortal conflict they were hurled back, defeated and disgraced, to their Asiatic home. But this was not his greatest

disgrace. When pure Vashti refused to honor his drunken whims, and thus dishonor both herself and him, he thrust her from her throne and sent her away, robbed of everything except her virtue and her conscience. But this dark deed was to some extent atoned for when twice he held out the scepter to Esther, and saved her and her people, and when he remembered and rewarded faithful Mordecai. But this fickle, and often furious, and yet sometimes kind, monarch, has long since been stripped of his power, and been called, as all of us will soon be, to give an account of his stewardship. His privileges and responsibilities were co-extensive, and if he never trembled before, he must have shuddered as he stood face to face with these before the great white throne of God.

We must bid farewell to Mordecai. Some men are great because they inherit a certain name. Others because they have written a great poem, or made a great speech. Others because they have slain multitudes of their fellow-men in battle. Others because by cunning and audacity they manage to keep themselves in prominent places. And others by the sheer

force of their intellects. But Mordecai, while he possessed brain and courage in a high degree, rose to greatness not so much because of these as because of his goodness. He was high in the king's house, not because of political intrigue, or because of his gifts as an orator, or because of his fame as an author or soldier, but because of his moral worth. He did right for right's sake. With him virtue was its own reward. The cry of an orphan child found a response in his sympathetic heart. The sight of the dagger of an assassin sent him in swift rescue to the king. And the oppression of his people awoke his patriotic devotion. God saw all this, and in due time lifted him from his lowly position, and gave him one commensurate with his worth. Noble hero! His memory lingers with us as the fragrance of sweet flowers, and his name as the synonym of faithfulness and devotion.

But last of all we must bid farewell to Esther, the matchless heroine of our story. Though born in exile and reared in orphanage, she graced and honored the world's greatest crown. By a strange revolution of the wheel of fortune

she early passes from a cottage to a palace. But soon her sun is beclouded. Haman determined upon the destruction of her people. At the suggestion of Mordecai, and after three days' fasting, she enters unbidden the palace of Xerxes, and receives the golden scepter. With marked skill and caution she reverses the tide, hurls Haman from his place, and exalts Mordecai in his stead. Again, with life in hand, she enters the presence of the king, and again she receives the golden scepter. She now pleads for her people, and they are saved. And her grateful heart, to commemorate the triumph, establishes a feast which continues to this day. But we must part with our brilliant and beautiful queen, in many respects the most interesting figure in female history. In her veins coursed the oldest and best blood. The light of a generation of heroes shone in her eyes. At times she was so timid as to fear her own shadow, and again she is as fearless as a tigress robbed of her young. Her courage comes and goes like the blood-tide on her fair cheeks. To-day she is as modest as a violet, and to-morrow as terrible and irresistible as Niagara. Farewell! Thy

fair form and features, and all thy personal charms have faded and gone back to mother earth; but now, more beautiful than the myrtle, and more lustrous than the most brilliant star, thou art safe in the Father's house in heaven.

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